



Media Contact:
Patrick Harrison
Paradise Advertising & Marketing, Inc.
(727) 821-5155 ext 110
Patrick@paradiseadv.com

HISTORY AND HERITAGE IN SEMINOLE COUNTY

The past and present thrive side-by-side in Seminole County. Just a few minutes north of Orlando, visitors can be immersed in turn-of-the-century Florida in Sanford. Located on the south shore of Lake Monroe at the head of navigation on the St. Johns River, Sanford became the “Gateway into the Interior of Central Florida.”

After the United States acquired Florida from Spain, a U.S. Army post known as Camp Monroe was established during the Seminole Indian Wars and a fort was built to protect the military. Captain Charles Mellon was the first person killed at the fort so it was renamed Fort Mellon and the surrounding community was named Mellonville. Wharfs were built into Lake Monroe to accommodate the steamboats that were bringing supplies and travelers to the area.

In 1870 Henry Shelton Sanford, a distinguished lawyer and former Minister to Belgium, purchased 12,548 acres of land west of Mellonville and plotted the namesake community which was incorporated in 1877. General Sanford began to import exotic plants from all over the world including citrus and pineapples. More than one hundred varieties of citrus were planted in his experimental grove and garden. Mellonville and Sanford co-existed beside each other for several years until Mellonville was annexed into Sanford.

In the 1880s, railroads were built to connect Sanford with Lake Mary, Longwood and Altamonte Springs. Seminole County was a spider web of smaller rail lines that led to the hub in Sanford to transport citrus to northern markets. Sanford was booming with a railroad station, the Sanford House Hotel, churches, and parks.

In 1887, a fire destroyed most of the wooden buildings in the downtown area, but worse was yet to come for the area. In 1894 and 1895, a deep freeze blanketed the entire area, breaking the citrus trees down to the ground from the weight of the ice. The agricultural industry was able to bounce back by shifting the focus to vegetables. Seminole County became known as the “Celery Capital of the World” until the late 1970s.

Although the county continued to rely on agricultural as a means of economic sustenance, over time, the community diversified into ornamental and woody plants, light industry and tourism-related activities. Sanford has maintained much of its quaint, turn-of-the-century atmosphere thanks to the preservation of some of its greatest landmarks.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Sanford features outstanding examples of classic Victorian, Queen Anne and Cracker-style architecture typical of late 19th century Florida along its self-guided walking tour route. Antique shops, bookstores, cafes and art galleries also abound in the Main Street historic district, adding to the ambiance of the community.

History buffs will also revel in two of the community’s museums. The Sanford Museum reflects on the life and times of the city’s founder, Henry Sanford, while the Museum of Seminole County History showcases two buildings with a vast collection of period antiques, historical photographs and exhibits of early Florida agricultural and transportation.

Another historic area can be found in Longwood, the oldest city in south Seminole County. Although Longwood is now primarily a residential community, some of the city’s past has been preserved and restored in Longwood’s historical district. The district includes the Bradlee-McIntyre House, the only surviving winter

“cottage” in Orange and Seminole counties; the “Inside-Outside” House, one of the oldest prefabricated houses in the United States; and the most impressive historic landmark in the city, the elegant Longwood Hotel. Shops featuring collectibles, antiques and decorative accessories dot its walking tour route.

By embracing its past and preserving its roots, Seminole County has remained a peaceful haven in the midst of a bustling region. More information about the history of Seminole County is available at the Museum of Seminole County History, 300 Bush Boulevard, Sanford, FL 32773, phone: (407) 665-2489.

HISTORIC TIMELINE

2000BC - 1700s	Timucuan Indians live on the shores of Lake Monroe
1760s	Timucuans disappear from Florida and the Seminoles come to Florida from Alabama & Georgia
1817	Philip R. Young receives the Spanish Land Grant
1818	The United States purchases Florida from Spain
1835	Seminole Indian War
1836	Camp Monroe established
1837	Camp Monroe is renamed Fort Mellon in honor of Captain Charles Mellon, who was killed during a battle with the Seminoles
1840	The community of Mellonville is formed around Fort Mellon
1841	Fort Mellon is closed
1845	Florida incorporated, creating Orange County and its county seat Mellonville
1849	General Joseph Finegan purchases the Levy Grant
1856	Orlando becomes the county seat of Orange County
1870	Henry Sanford purchases 12,547 acres of land from General Finegan
1876	Town of Longwood established
1880	Geneva established
1883	Mellonville is annexed into Sanford
1887	The east side of Sanford burns to the ground, during the night of September 20
1894-1895	The "Great Freeze" wipes out the citrus industry
1908	Sanford Herald is established
1913	Seminole County is created on April 25, with Sanford as the county seat
1925	Sanford Zoo opens
1942	Naval Air Station opens as a training base for carrier pilots.
1956	Seminole Memorial Hospital opens on First Street
1960	Hurricane Donna ravages the county
1969	I-4 opens in Sanford
1970	Auto train terminal opens
1982	Museum of Seminole County History opens
1985-86	Big Freeze hits citrus industry
2000	Restoration of the Ritz Theatre completed
2003	New Agricultural Building at the Museum of Seminole County History

Located in the heart of Central Florida, and within a 15-minute drive from its tourist-magnet neighbor, Orlando, Seminole County offers immediate access to theme parks, exciting entertainment and thrilling nightlife. Surrounded by the beauty of natural Florida, Seminole County also offers the classic Florida experience of peaceful rivers, fishing, boating, hiking and more. And it's all within an easy drive of Florida's fabulous Treasure Coast beaches and Kennedy Space Center.

For destination information call 1-800-800-7832 (USA and Canada) or 407-665-2900 (outside the USA) or visit www.VisitSeminole.com.

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